DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 204 JC 000 020

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TITLE Confronting the Future: Instruction Can Do It.
PUB DATE 1999-11-04
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Colleges; *Educational Change; Educational Development; *Faculty Development; *Instruction; Leadership; *Long Range Planning; Organizational Change; Organizational Development; Organizational Objectives; Organizational Theories; Student Needs; *Teacher Effectiveness; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods; Teaching Models; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Community colleges are on the cutting edge of the multidirectional change with the coming of a new century. Peters and Waterman, two management consultants, have spawned thousands of models, designs, and strategies for using organizational excellence as a gyroscope for navigating the turbulence of change. This paper presents Waterman's four-step template that provides those seeking to use instruction as a change management design with a perspective for assessment: (1) structure: engaging the task; (2) systems: leveraging change; (3) style: pick your strategies; and (4) strategy: the Minnesota mindset. A careful analysis of the components and infusion into a college's culture will give direction and perspective. The author concludes that the transition to a learning organization is a task that will succeed to the extent that it is in the hands of those who must implement it. Faculty must be encouraged to create a common, shared meaning out of a reality that is kaleidoscopic-multi-dimensional and always changing. They have the ability if given the opportunity. (VWC)

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CONFRONTING THE FUTURE:

INSTRUCTION CAN DO IT

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November 4, 1999

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Introduction: Excellence, The Search Continues

The new century will begin in a mere fifty-seven days. Scholars, seers, and sages are predicting a bewildering array of changes impacting upon all aspects of society. Community colleges are on the cutting edge of the multidirectional change. Is it possible to bring order out of seeming chaos? Margaret Wheatley in Leadership and the New Science[1] suggests that chaos is not a negative force. She describes the process as "order without predictability." Society's challenge, she asserts, is to step away from the situation, gain perspective, and identify elements of constancy. If we are to follow her direction, what paradigms are available?

Seventeen years ago, two management consultants, Peters and Waterman, launched America on a search for excellence.[2] Their work has spawned thousands of models, designs, and strategies for using organizational excellence as a gyroscope for navigating the turbulence of change. Community colleges monitor carefully strategies for change management. As the people's colleges, they are called upon constantly to assist their clients with the selection of appropriate ones. Faculty are essential to the process. Is there a template that they can use to ensure that their instruction is effective in meeting client needs? Again, it is useful to turn to the search for excellence.

Waterman continues his investigation. Fourteen years after the search began, he presented a design culled from a variety of successful applications. His four-step template provides those seeking to use instruction as a change management design with a perspective for assessment. A careful analysis of the

components and infusion into a college's culture will give direction and perspective.[3]

Structure: Engaging the Task

Two community colleges in Maryland, Hagerstown Community College (HCC) and Catonsville Community College (CCC), undertook a process of instructional reorganization in 1997. After two years of effort, the process is gradually coming into focus.[4] Four steps emerge as critical. After a model is decided upon, a series of tactics need to be applied that develop ownership among all college stakeholders. Examples include focus groups, self-directed work teams, and open forums for review and assessment. Participants are given the opportunity to synthesize the best of "what is" with strategies for improvement.

The second step is to open communication on all levels. Along with the elements referred to above, informal "coffees," social gatherings, and college convocations provide avenues for understanding. All of these strategies contribute to the control of rumor–an enemy of change.

The third step is based on timing. In the case of HCC, the revised structure was implemented over several semesters with a careful blend of risk-taking and stasis. A planning process has allowed for the integration of the new design (structure), the development of revised decision making procedures (ownership), and a broad-based understanding of both the design and the direction that the structure is taking the college (communication).

This initiative would not have been successful had step four not been present--continuous focus. During the transition, the college underwent a five-year reaccreditation exercise. The mission of the institution remained constant. Changes in instructional organization and delivery remained anchored to the mission. The reaccreditation document made it clear that the changes were undertaken to improve service to a changing client base. External evaluators recognized the synergy; the college received an excellent rating.

Is a formative assessment for the Waterman design available? Flynn analyzes the rapidly emerging new paradigm for the 21st century--learning organizations. He synthesizes what impact the paradigm is having on faculty and instruction.[5] The result is a set of "transformation propositions." If the Waterman template is valid, it should integrate with Flynn's model. Structure reinforces two of Flynn's propositions. First, redesign aligns faculty/client interactions differently. Key aspects of the change are innovation and measurability. Second, Flynn presents the importance of developing awareness of "external climate and competitive forces."[6] The entire restructuring process concentrates on faculty collaborative leadership in positioning the institution for the new millennium. Thus far, the propositions validate the Waterman template.

Systems: Leveraging Change

In late 1998, the vice president of the Education Commission of the States, Kay M. McClenney, published an environmental scan reviewing the impact of

change on community colleges. Her findings are both interesting and relevant. Her focus is learning. "To transform [the process] requires, first, clarity about what is to be learned; second, regular assessment of [the process], and . . . third, a willingness to look at what . . . data tell us about the learning that is or is not occurring."[7] She considers instructional systems and faculty as the primary targets for transformation. There are three critical elements that comprise the process.

First, the focus of the college must be assessed and affirmed. HCC developed a set of "core values" that emphasize learning and client development. Faculty have demonstrated ownership through infusion into teaching and curriculum development. Further, they have designed an outreach strategy to the local educational system that is building a "seamless web of learning" for an essential clientele.

Second, the faculty are rethinking their role. McClenney uses the phrase, "modeler of competence."[8] Through a National Science Foundation project, HCC faculty are providing opportunities for students to master and then demonstrate higher order learning. To do so they had to model the behavior. Also, they are using self-directed work groups to change the college curriculum and integrate it with high schools and transfer institutions. The common theme is measurable outcomes validated by employers and student performance after transfer.

Finally, the leveraging process must be proactive. Rather than responding to crises, the mode must be identifying and seizing "golden opportunities." The

focus that engenders such a transformation is a simple but critical perspective– how does any change or modification enhance learning?

Do Flynn's propositions concur with this change dynamic? Essential to his model is faculty centrality. They must be allowed to develop mastery in "identifying [student] learning styles, modular curriculum [design], and instructional technology" application.[9] The result will be a new role definition as effective assessors of student achievement and efficient modelers of the new learning paradigm.

Style: Pick Your Strategies

Since each institution has an organizational culture, is there a process that will allow stakeholders to envision which system best suits the college? Baldock, a principal in Anderson Consulting, London, suggests an eclectic approach. Each scenario examined needs to answer the question, "what, if we saw it today, would suggest to us that one particular future was beginning to unfold . . . over . . . any other?"[10] He recommends first that faculty remain flexible. They develop broad competence to ensure a "nimble" response to change. Also, self-directed teams should be organized to engage change as their regular responsibility.

Second, the stakeholders (faculty and staff) need to develop a thorough understanding of the college's core competencies. The purpose is to "leverage" strengths as opportunities. Also, the approach assists the institution in determining

where collaboration with others is needed. This approach will prevent a mediocre response based on trying to be "all things to all clients."

Third, the faculty must guard against the NIH or "not invented here" syndrome. Other organizations have designed programs and services that can be introduced "outside-in." The result is an agile college that concentrates on adaptation and assessment rather than "ground up" development. Is this approach validated by Flynn's formative assessment?

The transformation design stresses two style elements that contribute to agility. Initially, Flynn recommends that the curriculum development cycle be "shortened and streamlined." The result positions the college to be a responsive partner in the community, economic, and workforce development process.

Further, he proposes that along with maintaining a core curriculum attuned to the needs of the college's service area, the institution collaborate with the private sector in developing an array of competency certifications.[11] The inside-out approach ensures that faculty are perceived as competent partners in development.

Strategy: The Minnesota Mindset

Organizational delivery during the 21st century is unlikely to be linear and rational. Responses, according to Piturro, a Microsoft consultant, will require a "mind shift" to gestalt and ingenuity.[12] Her model is well suited to community colleges.

She draws upon a corporate culture model developed by Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M) in 1993. First, the 3M design is team based. The approach is consistent with the self-directed teams approach mentioned earlier. Further, these teams must be empowered by being encouraged to make decisions and set the time parameters for delivery.

Second, the team must be allowed to manage risk. Control measures must be built in to provide feedback, but the "right to fail" must be ensured.

Third, the college needs to redesign its resource allocation system. Teams will not be truly empowered until they have the resources to implement their plans. Also, the allocation of resources provides the foundation for valid accountability.

Finally, the college needs to modify its institutional research and assessment (IR-A) design. Self-directed teams must work closely with IR-A staff to identify appropriate benchmarks and structure feedback mechanisms that indicate the degree of accomplishment so that redirection may be undertaken if needed. How does the Flynn transformation process assess strategy?

An essential element in transformation is stakeholder buy-in. Flynn recommends that colleges institute a "core training program" involving all employees. The purpose of the training is to revise the college culture. The goals are the development of a common approach, commitment, and language of the

learning organization.[13] The degree of institutionwide congruence is essential to the process of transformation.

Conclusion: Leading From Where You Are

The Waterman template states that "the organization is designed for learning...."[14] Who owns the process and how does it become institutionalized? Wheatley, in her sequel to Leadership and the New Science, engages the question. "Our first task, then, is to see the [mission] differently. We need to observe processes that we either ignored or could not see."[15] She suggests that mastering change will require the establishment of self-organizing systems. "[These] create their own structure, patterns of behavior, and processes for accomplishing."[16] Since faculty are the personification of the college's mission, they become the core of the self-organizing systems. How does the process occur and what are the outcomes?

Wheatley, in her earlier work, suggests that leaders, in this case the faculty, "bring us... to the importance of simple...principles: guiding visions, strong values, organizational beliefs...."[17] These elements take on a relational dimension. Leadership is dependent on context and context is established by the relationships that are valued. Further, there is an interdependence between how things appear and the environment that causes them to appear.[18] The transition to a learning organization is a task that will succeed to the extent that it is in the hands of those who must implement it. Faculty must be encouraged to create a common, shared

meaning out of a reality that is kaleidoscopic--multi-dimensional and always changing. They have the ability if given the opportunity. Flynn synthesizes the challenge well by quoting Proust: "The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands, but in seeing with new eyes."[19] We are equal to the task.

End Notes

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